

Rich in Insight

An Interview with Kathleen Ciaramello,
President, National FoodService and On-Premise, Coca-Cola Refreshments,
and Yolanda White, Group Director, Tea Brands, Coca-Cola North America Group

EDITORS' NOTE Kathleen Ciaramello was recently appointed to her current post. Prior to this, she was East Zone Vice President for the FoodService/On-Premise division. Ciaramello is also one of 12 inaugural members of the Coca-Cola Women's Leadership Council sponsored by CEO Muhtar Kent. She also led the Diversity and Inclusion Council for the Southeast Region of Coca-Cola Refreshments. In 1985, Ciaramello joined The Coca-Cola Company's North America FoodService unit, serving in various account management roles in New Jersey, Boston, St. Louis, and Atlanta. She became Director of Leisure Marketing in 1997, Group Director of Leisure and Strategic Alliances in 2000, and Vice President, Strategic Alliances in 2001. From October 2006 to May 2009, she was Group Vice President of Strategic Partnership Marketing. She has a bachelor's degree in business administration from Boston College.

Yolanda White joined The Coca-Cola Company in 1999 as an associate brand manager for Powerade. She has worked on many core brands, from Sprite to Fresca. Within her first three years at Coca-Cola, she launched Vanilla Coke, one of the most successful new products. Later, she launched Coke Blak in the U.S. in partnership with France. In addition to her brand roles, White led African-American marketing for Coca-Cola North America. She has extensive management experience with external agencies like the Martin Agency and Saatchi & Saatchi. She has an M.B.A. from Clark Atlanta University and a B.S. in Accounting from Tuskegee University.

COMPANY BRIEF The Coca-Cola Company (www.thecoca-colacompany.com) refreshes consumers with more than 500 sparkling and still brands. Led by Coca-Cola, the world's most valuable brand, the company's portfolio features 15 billion-dollar brands including Diet Coke, Fanta, Sprite, Coca-Cola Zero, vitaminwater, Powerade, Minute Maid, Simply, and Georgia. Through the world's largest beverage distribution system, consumers in nearly 200 countries enjoy the company's beverages at a rate of 1.7 billion servings a day.

Kathleen, what is your area of focus?

Ciaramello: National FoodService & On-Premise is our company's original oldest division. It includes all of our large regional, national, and global food service, and on-premise customers that are headquartered in the U.S., so things like restaurants, movie theaters, theme parks, airlines,



Kathleen Ciaramello



Yolanda White

onsite providers like Compass, specialty retailers like Home Depot – basically anywhere that you'd grab an iced-cold Coke and drink it right away or soon thereafter in a bottle, can or cup with ice.

Yolanda, how does innovation play out in a traditional area like coffee and tea?

White: When you talk about the culture of innovation, you are talking about coffee and tea, where we do tremendous work on innovation and satisfying new consumer needs on a daily basis.

Our focus is on building out our consumer strategies, and making sure we have the right pipeline and that we are integrated with the system so we can remain relevant in the marketplace.

How do you get ahead of the curve to provide for future consumer needs?

White: As a part of The Coca-Cola Company, we are so rich in insight, which helps us get underneath trends that people might find difficult to articulate – the needs they project they will have to fulfill.

We stay in tune with the macro trends happening in the marketplace that are driving what we need to deliver against today. One of those macro trends is health and wellness. How do we deliver against that? What are people looking for? What are the taste cues we need to deliver against? That is one example of how we have started at a higher level and translated it into new opportunities for our organization.

Ciaramello: On the food service side, we invest in proprietary consumer insights throughout the food service channel. Our business model focuses on enhancing each customer's success, and that focus gives us a great advantage in terms of innovation and having sight lines further down the road.

Is there close coordination within these groups?

White: Ours is a matrix organization. We stay very connected and we work collaboratively. In order to operate with speed and ensure we're tapping into the right insights, we have built processes within our business model that lead us to stay connected, not just on a monthly basis but on a daily basis.

It starts with us kicking our week off together and remaining steeped in what is happening in our business, and making sure we carry through to solutions that will allow us to be proactive and to course correct whenever we need to, and see where there are new opportunities.

What makes the company special with regard to diversity?

Ciaramello: Six years ago, the company took a detailed look at the internal and external factors related to gender diversity on a global basis. It was discovered that women are 40 percent of the global workforce; 50 percent of the global population; 70 percent or more of the household purchases of our products; and \$20 trillion is the annual worldwide spend, more than the U.S., China, and India combined – women like to shop.

So focusing on gender diversity wasn't just the right thing to do, but the best course of business to reach our consumers and customers. It was also a way to have access to 100 percent of the talent.

Muhtar Kent (Chairman and CEO) put together the Women's Leadership Council which was, at the time, 12 of us around the world. We were charged with coming up with strategies and metrics, and advising Muhtar and his operating committee on the things that need to change.

We started this work in 2008 when we had 23 percent women at senior levels; we're now up to 31 percent. We have moved from 28 percent to 34 percent if you look at our pipeline of the next level down. If you go deeper, we've gotten the number to 46 percent. For external hiring, we've gone from 13 percent in 2007 to 41 percent.

The work we have done has been more focused on building capability and the leadership skills, so when positions are open, we have viable and diverse candidates to go for those jobs.

Our 5by20 program is our external ambition to economically empower women. We have put a stake in the ground that says by 2020, we will empower five million women entrepreneurs across our global value chain. This is a program that we're all very proud of, and it has served to inspire the women within the four walls of Coca-Cola. ●